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THE
VENUS
DI
MIL
ITS HISTORY



AND ITS ART

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ARTES SCIENTIA VERITAS

THE VENUS DI MILO,

ITS HISTORY AND ITS ART.

BY

ALEXANDER DEL MAR,

Author of "The Worship of Augustus Cæsar," "The Middle Ages Revisited,"
"Ancient Britain," "The History of Money," Etc.



NEW YORK
THE CAMBRIDGE ENCYCLOPEDIA COMPANY

1900

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FRANK PALOMA.

The restoration of the Venus di Milo, which had so long defied the efforts of artists, (it having been frequently attempted both in Italy, France, and England,) was finally accomplished by Frank Paloma, a rising young American painter now residing in London. This artist was born in Washington, 1868; studied in the Ecole Julien of Paris —among others, under the celebrated Bougereau—and perfected his artistic education in the great salons of Germany, Bavaria, and Holland. The design which embellishes the present brochure was drawn especially for the CAMBRIDGE ENCYCLOPEDIA CO. The artist, in a letter to the publishers, expresses some surprise that the true pose of the Venus was not discovered at once, because the muscles of the right arm, the raising of the left side of the body, and the posture of the left knee, all combine to prove that the Venus must have sustained a heavy weight upon her left arm. The weight could have been none other than the Holy Child.



THE VENUS DI MILO.

THIS UNRIVALLED PRODUCT of Hellenic art now stands in the Salle des Cariatides of the Louvre. It was found in the island of Milo, anciently Melos, during the month of February, 1820. A peasant named Jorgos Bottonis, and his son Antonio, were working together in a field upon the mountain side near the village of Castro. Suddenly a portion of the ground caved in. Exploring the cavity thus disclosed, Jorgos came upon a small shrine or temple, the interior of which, says Morey, was decorated in colors. In this temple Jorgos made such strange discoveries that he conceived it his duty at once to communicate them to the village priest. This man, one Oiconomos, a caloyer, or monk of the order of St. Basil, soon visited the spot. What was seen and done there, we do not

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THE VENUS DI MILO.

and a pedestal, with an inscription "now effaced"; the other a Child, (*tete d'enfant*). Marcellus says (p. 235) that there were "three Hermes." De Quincey says (p. 10) that the smaller statues were three feet high, but he does not say that they were all of these dimensions. Frohner says (p. 172) that one of the statues was an Indian Bacchus and another the Little Mercury, and ignores the third one altogether. Clarac alludes to the third one, and then snubs him.³

At that period, when Greece was thrown open to travellers for the first time in ages, the search for and the sale of antiquities, had become an important industry. To find a statue was to find, what to a Greek peasant, was a fortune. There was always a market, always some western barbarian near at hand, with money, ready to buy. The proposed victim in this instance was M. Brest; and the price asked for the lot was 25,000 francs. Without saying what he thought of the other antiquities, it is evident that the consul was much struck with the Venus; for although he gave no encouragement to the vendors, he immediately wrote a letter to the French ambassador at Constantinople, describing the find, and asking for authority and means to purchase such portions of it as the minister might deem



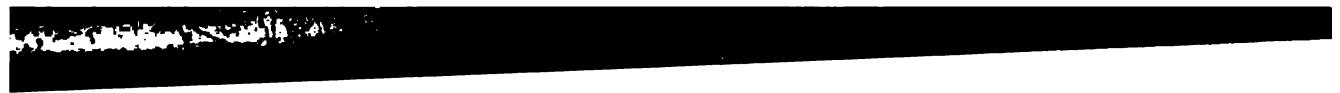


THE VENUS DI MILO.

5

desirable. That letter was so long delayed on its way, that the vendors seem to have given up all hope of selling the antiquities to M. Brest; for, toward the end of April, they offered the mutilated Venus (alone), to another Frenchman, for 1,200 francs. This was the afterward celebrated D'Urville, then an ensign or flag-lieutenant on the man-of-war "Chevrette," which had arrived at Melos on the 16th of April. After viewing the find and conferring with M. Brest on the subject, D'Urville made a sketch of the Venus, which he forwarded, with strong recommendations for its purchase, to his friend Martin du Tyrac, the Count Marcellus, then Secretary of the French legation at Constantinople. Whether M. Brest's letter had reached Constantinople by this time, or not, is uncertain, and the letter itself, like D'Urville's sketch, and many other things connected with this matter, has disappeared.⁴ However, the effect of D'Urville's letter and sketch, was instantaneous. The Count Marcellus was promptly authorized and furnished with the means to purchase and remove the Venus, and with this object he shortly afterwards left Constantinople on the "Estafette," and arrived, May 23rd, at Melos. Here a great surprise awaited him.

The Venus had been sold and removed from the island. Who had



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THE VENUS DI MILO.

6

bought it? The priest Oiconomos. For how much? Four thousand eight hundred francs. Was the money paid? No; but the priest had bought it for Nikolaki Morusi, third son of the former prince of Moldavia, and now Greek interpreter at the Turkish arsenal of Stamboul, who was a rich man and certain pay. When was the sale made? A few days ago. Where was the statue now? On board a vessel bound to Stamboul. What! On the little Greek brig, with a Turkish flag, still lying in the road of Melos? The same.

Upon receiving this information the Count at once determined to obtain possession of the statue. He manned one of the "Estafette's" boats, boarded the Greek brig, and obtained the promise of its captain not to attempt to leave the port without his, the Count's, knowledge. Then accompanied by M. Brest he went ashore, summoned the authorities of the island to a conference, and laid the whole matter before them. His case was that the Venus had been offered to Lieut. D'Urville for 1,200 francs, with the provision that the latter should have time enough (in which to accept or decline the offer) to communicate with the legation at Constantinople; that he had done so; that he, Marcellus, now accepted the offer; and here was the money, (producing it), not only the price originally suggested to the



lieutenant, but the one eventually promised by the priest, namely, 4,800 francs.

After alluding in no complimentary terms to the zeal and indecent haste of the ecclesiastics who had taken part in this transaction, he significantly reminded the authorities that he was in a position not to be trifled with, and wound up by respectfully but firmly demanding to be placed in possession of the statue. This demand was warmly seconded by the persuasions of M. Brest, whom the islanders had long known and highly esteemed. The authorities were much puzzled how to act. There were the priests on one side and the guns of a very ugly looking French man-of-war on the other. As for Jorgos, he seems to have affected entire indifference. If he had any secret leaning, it was probably with the Count's gold, rather than the promises of Morusi's ghostly agent. The perturbation of the island assembly may be gathered from the fact that they sat up all night to discuss the case of the Venus. In the morning, though not without great misgivings, they were resolved. The Count Marcellus had won his case. Without loss of time the latter paid to Jorgos not merely the 4,800 francs mentioned, but a fourth more, that is to say, 6,000 francs. Receiving from him a formal bill of sale, he boarded

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THE VENUS DI MILO.

8

the Greek brig again, and swinging the source of so much contention at the end of a watch-tackle, he lowered her into the boat alongside, and triumphantly deposited her on board the "Estafette." This was on the 25th May.

Upon examining the statue carefully, it was seen to have been much disfigured, but by whom, or when, or in what respects, we are not informed. The statue consisted of two blocks of coralitic marble, the head and bust being chiselled from one block and the lower portion of the figure from the other.⁶ Besides this, the shipment included some fragments of several arms, one of which (a hand) held what has been supposed to be an apple. Another was the dimpled hand of an infant. There was also part of a head dress. It is almost universally conceded that the arm with the so-called apple does not fit, and that it formed no part of the Venus; that the Venus when first seen by D'Urville had no complete arms upon it; and that Jorgos said that three arms and part of a foot were found with it.⁷ But no dependence can be placed upon Jorgos' statements. What he saw, he saw with his own eyes; what he said he saw, he said with the tongue of the caloyer; and the caloyer's tongue was guided by his religious belief.⁸ The Count Marcellus says positively that the



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"arm" with the "apple" formed no part of the original Venus. He continues as follows: "It can be demonstrated that the statue represented the Panagia or Holy Virgin, of the little Greek chapel, whose ruins I saw at Milo." * This phrase, like a gleam of light, followed by utter darkness, relates to nothing else and reveals nothing else. The subject is not alluded to again by the Count Marcellus, whose book, like D'Urville's, is more remarkable for what it omits, than what it contains. Neither of them contain a description of the ground, the neighborhood, the temple, the Venus when first seen, the people who found it, nor the priests who are suspected of mutilating it. Marcellus' book contains a small engraving of the statue, but does not state whether this was drawn at Melos or Paris; probably the latter. It shows the statue much as it appears now, except that the left arm, now torn off at the socket, then extended about halfway down to the elbow. In one place (I, 236) Marcellus says that Jorgos found the two portions of the Venus separately and after an interval of a fortnight; in another, (248), that they were united by an iron tenon. D'Urville says the two portions were found united together, but that Jorgos, fearing to lose the fruit of his labors, severed them and hid the lower part. On a pedestal which



accompanied the statue and which, though not united to it, may have belonged to it, the Messieurs Debay, who examined the remains on their arrival in Paris, found an inscription in Greek capital letters, which, as translated, read: “(Arges) *andros, son of Menides, of Antioch, on the Meander, executed this work.*” The first four letters of this inscription are supplied by conjecture. Antioch was in the Taurus mountains of Phrygia. The Meander flows into the Aegian sea, a little north of the gulf of Iasius. Agesandros was the name of the sculptor of Rhodes, to whom is ascribed the celebrated Laocoön, which was discovered at Rome in 1506, purchased by pope Julius II., and, after an interval, deposited in the Vatican. It is now in the Museum of the Capitol. Its æra is usually ascribed to the fifth century, B. C. There are critics who have ascribed the Laocoön and therefore, also, its author, Argesandros, to the Augustan age, and even to a period so late as the latter part of the second century; but all such opinions have now become antiquated. Connoisseurs are divided in ascribing the Venus di Milo to the sculptor of the Laocoön, or, from its resemblance to the Niobe group at Florence, to a pupil of Scopas, tempo Philip of Macedon, fourth century, B. C. (Frohner, 168.) Unfortunately the pedestal and



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THE VENUS DI MILO.

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inscription, which the Messieurs Debay saw, translated, and made a sketch of, underwent some alteration in the workshop of the Royal Museum, and has since disappeared altogether. Some writers on the subject even doubt that it existed; but there seems no good reason for such a doubt. What purports to be the sketch is still extant.

With regard to the antiquities not embarked on the "Estafette" at Melos, they consisted, first, of the Hermes and Child, before mentioned. What became of them we are not informed. Then there was a mutilated marble slab, four feet long and eight inches wide, which was found over the entrance to the temple and contained an inscription, which D'Urville, Marcellus, Clarac and Frohner publish and construe, with variations, and which, as given by the latter, says: "*Bakchios, son of Satias, sub-gymnasiarch of Melos, caused to be erected this portico (exedra) sacred to . . . Hermes and Hercules.*"¹⁰ There were three principal blanks or mutilations in the slab, the largest one, the only one represented in the above translation, probably containing the name of which we are in search: that of the goddess of Melos. Marcellus says he did not secure the slab, because it was too heavy. Perhaps he was in a hurry to get away with the greater prize.



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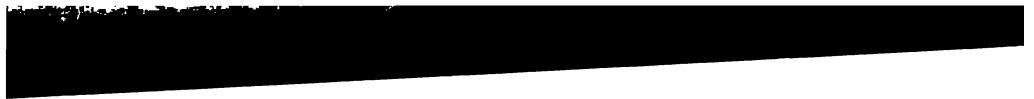
THE VENUS DI MILO.

12

After the statue had been taken from Melos, some further researches were made, when a gold collar and gold earrings of Byzantine workmanship, evidently belonging to the Venus, the latter torn from her ears by Jorgos,¹¹ were recovered and sent to France by the Marquis de la Tour Maubourg.^{11a} "Byzantine workmanship" implies an æra not earlier than the fourth century, when Theodosius reigned in Byzantium. A chance phrase of the Count Marcellus, which he uses without explanation, appears to connect this jewelry with the eighth century.¹² On the other hand, D'Urville alludes to the statue as being "twenty-two centuries" old, and although he gives no reason for this opinion, it is evidently quite correct and was probably derived from Fauvel, the antiquarian. D'Urville adds that the statue, when found, was in "a good state of preservation"—an important declaration, when we take into consideration its present mutilated condition.

After leaving Melos, the "Estafette" went to Rhodes, Cyprus, Saida, (Sidon) Alexandria, and the Piraeus, where the antiquarian Fauvel saw the Venus. After cruising about in this manner for some four or five months, the "Estafette" at length returned to Alexandria, and thence went to Smyrna, where the antiquities were trans-







THE VENUS DI MILO.

14

After the arrival of the statue in Paris, the Bavarian government laid claim to it on the following grounds: that in 1814 the king of Bavaria had obtained from the government of Turkey the right to search for antiquities on the site of the ancient theatre of Melos, and that the statue was found nearer to this theatre than to the residence of Jorgos; but this claim was not allowed.

The sculptor employed to prepare the Venus for public inspection was Bernard Lange, born at Thoulouse, 1754, died at Paris, 1839. Among the various alterations which it has since been discovered were made by this artist, are the following: The end of the left bosom was removed.¹⁵ The left arm was (probably) broken off at the socket. Alterations have been made in the navel and left breast. The hips were cut out and replaced by new ones. The back of the head was cut out and restored. The right shoulder is fractured. The left shoulder and back are much damaged; but this last may have been done in removing the statue. It should, however, be remarked, that on the back of another Venus, in the same museum, are to be seen the remains of the clasping hand of a Child. The alteration or restoration of some parts of the drapery is badly done; a fact which may perhaps be due to unskillfulness rather than



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design. It seems abundantly evident that above the goddess' head was something, and in her left arm Something Else, which it was the determination of the Greek priests to mutilate, and of the Catholic sculptor to destroy. But before entering this field of conjecture let us take a parting glance of the Venus as she was portrayed after her last mutilation.

"In every stroke of the chisel art judges will discover evidence of the fine perception the Hellenic artist had for every expression, even the slightest, of a nobly-developed woman's form. As an entire work, as well as in each part, one finds the full-blown flower of womanly beauty. In every contour there is a moderation that includes luxuriance, whilst it excludes weakness. To this figure the words of Homer may be applied, 'It blooms with eternal youth,' and anything comparable to it has never been seen. Even the manner in which the outer skin, the 'epidermis,' is reproduced in the marble, is unsurpassed. After rubbing with pumice-stone it was customary, with the Greek sculptors of the good period, to let the chisel skim lightly over the surface of the marble, when they wished to produce the effect of a skin warm with life and soft as velvet. On far too many ancient works, however, this outer skin has been



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destroyed by polishing. Here, nothing of the kind has taken place; the nude parts appear like an elastic cellular tissue." ¹⁶

After the public were permitted to view this image, which, despite all its mutilations, was still so beautiful, that the poet Heine is said to have knelt to it in a fit of passionate admiration, many attempts were made to construe or restore it in a different way from Lange's. M. Quatremere de Quincey published several plates, after certain well known groups in the museums of Florence and Rome, which represent Venus embracing Mars; and one in which the Venus di Milo is represented in a similar group. But all these designs show Venus bending toward or inclining to Mars, which was not the attitude of the goddess of Melos. Neither was any Mars found with her, or near her. Millingen, (Series II, pl. VI) proposed a restoration, in which the goddess is holding out a large shield, as though it were a looking-glass, to reflect back the faces of a gaping crowd; a posture and accessory both awkward, unnatural and unwarranted. M. Claudio Tarral, misled by one of the fragments found at Melos, placed in her left hand an apple, "the price of the victory of Paris."

In the "Century" Magazine for November, 1881, appeared the





narrative of Mr. Stillman, who, it seems, visited the island of Milo with the view to gather any information concerning the Venus which might yet be gleaned. The expedition appears to have been utterly barren of fruit; and Mr. Stillman's paper contains nothing but what he might have gathered from the printed literature of the subject, plus a few errors, which prove that even this literature was not studied very closely. We have only space for a few remarks on his paper. 1. Dumont D'Urville was not "the Commander of the 'Chevrette.'" 2. The "theatre" alluded to was five miles away from the place where the Venus was found. 3. The "apple" formed no part of this statue, but belonged to a theory in the mind of Dauriac, who (in spite of his statement to the contrary) never saw an apple in the hand of this figure. Stillman himself elsewhere (top of p. 96) admits that the hand (to the wrist) grasping what is said to be an "apple" and other parts now exhibited with the statue, were found in another place and at a later period, and that some of these fragments are of very rude workmanship. (p. 10.) He might have added that they are of different stone. 4. His theory of a Victory is gained from a fancied resemblance between the present (altered) Venus di Milo and the mutilated bas-relief of a headless

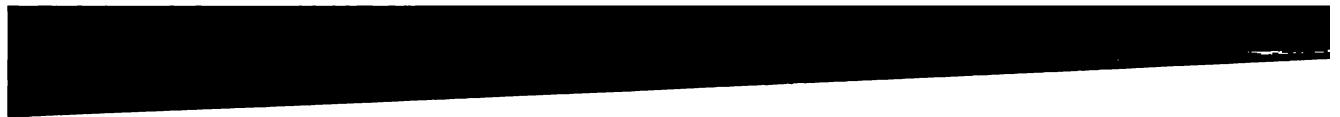


figure from the Acropolis (Temple of Niki Apteros) which is supposed to have been a Victory. 5. He says nothing of the alterations in the Venus, the head, arm, sides, drapery, etc. In fairness to Mr. Stillman it should be remarked that his paper on the subject, designed for popular reading, hardly lays claim to place in a serious discussion.

Mr. T. Bell, an English sculptor, has recently advanced another theory, and offered us a Venus di Milo as Victory distributing garlands to the meritorious. This is little more than an embodiment of Mr. Stillman's views. Lastly, Mr. Adolf Furtwangler, of Berlin, has undertaken to "forever" settle the whole matter. The Venus of Milo is a first century work copied from the Venus of Capua, looking at herself in a shield! "Our Venus was a draped figure, whose left arm rested on a pillar" and held an apple "loosely forward," while the right hand supported the drapery; a theory in which the triviality of motive is contemptuously belied by the grandeur and dignity of the form and the sacredness of its surroundings in the exedra. All of these artists and art critics appear to forget that the statue was that of a goddess, erected in a temple of worship, bedecked with jewels and accompanied by the infant



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Iacchus. They all overlook the fact that after having been mutilated at Melos, a portion of her left arm, still remaining upon her arrival in Paris, was torn off, that her hips were cut out, her bosom and navel chiselled down, and the back of her head renewed, by M. Bernard Lange. They all persist in regarding her merely as a type of female loveliness; whereas, it can hardly be doubted that she embodied a religious ideal, which, for at least several centuries, was worshipped as the Matrem Deorum.

Bearing these details in mind and remembering also the low type of religion that prevailed during the early Byzantine æra, when the bishop of Rome anointed the image of Phocas the murderer, and worshipped him as a divinity, it is difficult to resist the conviction that the Venus di Milo was originally, as suggested by the Count Marcellus, a Panagia, or Matrem Deorum, her head encircled by the sacred halo, and holding in her arms the divine Ies, or Iacchus. Pausanias and Lanciani—antiquarians separated by sixteen centuries of time—both assure us that it was a common custom of the Greeks and Romans, as we know it was afterwards of the medievals, to change the inscriptions upon the ancient statues and even to alter the statues, in accordance with the mutations of their national re-



ligions. Cicero, Dion Chrysostom, Plutarch, Col. Leake, and the good Bishop Kip, all confirm the prevalence of this custom; and mention many instances of its observance.¹⁷ What more natural, than for the pious islanders of Melos, terrified by the harsh edicts of Theodosius, to simply bury the pedestal and inscription belonging to their pagan goddess, and continue to worship under another name the same embodiment of that holy sentiment of love and maternity which they had hitherto been accustomed to adore.¹⁸ It is difficult to believe that any community which once possessed this unrivalled image, would surrender it to the iconoclast rather than merely consent to a trifling change in its name. It is still more difficult to believe that they should have hesitated to choose between such a change and the alternative of worshipping an image of Theodosius. Rather is it likely that emperor worship, long since cast out from the popular heart, was now reduced to a mere court and ecclesiastical formality, and that out of the wreck of the ancient mythology, the pious had clung to such fragments, as, like this ever-beautiful image, had power to inspire their minds with what was pure, ennobling and holy, and to guide their steps to the divine sanctuary of maternal love.



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NOTES.—¹ Melos is upon a line drawn from the southernmost point of Greece and the gulf of Iasius in Caria. ² Some of these fragments were formerly exhibited in a glass case placed near the Venus di Milo in the Louvre. ³ Other grottos and broken statues were found in the valley below. D'Urville, 150; Frohner, 172, ⁴ Apart from what he could testify as to facts within his own knowledge, D'Urville's testimony would have been of little worth, for his narrative, though exceedingly brief, is long enough to prove that he was thoroughly hoodwinked by the caloyer. He commences with stating that he knows nothing about statuary, or mythology, and yet immediately afterwards assumes that the arm with the apple must have belonged to the Venus; an assurance that we are compelled to regard as valueless. ⁵ Marcellus, 240. ⁶ There is a wooden wedge of modern origin between the two blocks in the



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backbone of the statue, the design being to give it a less upright posture. This alone is deceptive.¹ D'Urville, p. 151.⁸ "We shall never be able to trace the history of antiquity until monks have been forbidden access to its remains." The Abbé Raynal, "Hist. East and West Indies," ed. 1782, II, 270.⁹ Marcellus, I, 255.¹⁰ Marcellus, 249n; Clarac, Inscription. pl. 54, No. 2430; Frohner.¹¹ The lobes of the ears were torn off. Frohner, 171.^{11a} 'Properly, ye Latin matrons and maidens, do ye worship the goddess Venus. . . . Untie the golden necklaces from her neck of marble; remove her jewels; the goddess must be laved all over. Restore her golden necklaces to her neck when dried.' Ovid, Fasti, IV 33. Both ancient and modern mythologists have agreed in identifying the Chaldean, Egyptian and Syrian Matrem Deorum with the Greek Venus. Cf. Herodotus, Pausanias, Noël, Higgins, Greswell and Hislop.¹² Marcellus, 255.¹³ It was a "long time in the mysterious atelier of the Royal Museum." Marcellus, 255.¹⁴ Wieseler, "Denkmäler," II, 143; Fredericks, "Bausteine," p. 334.¹⁵ Frohner, 171.¹⁶ Viktor Rydberg quoted in "Paris," by Hare.¹⁷ Dion Chry. Rhodiac oration; Cicero ad Atticus I. 6, ep. 1; Plutarch, parrall. in M. Ant.; Col. W. M. Leake, "Topography of Athens," 208; Bishop Kip, "Christmas in Rhome."¹⁸ The other inscription, the one found above the entrance to the grotto, was probably defaced by the caloyer.